

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6233

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 10872

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT ET

SUBJECT: EPMG TO CELEBRATE FIRST BIRTHDAY

1. SUMMARY. AS THE EPMG PREPARES TO CELEBRATE THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE OVERTHROW OF HAILE SELASSIE ON SEPTEMBER 13, ADDIS ABABA IS ALIVE WITH RUMORS OF IMPENDING PERSONNEL CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT, NEW FINANCIAL POLICIES AND POSSIBLE CONFRONTATIONS, IF NOT VIOLENCE, BY DISSIDENT ELEMENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EPMG IS PREPARING TO "GO ALL OUT" AS IT CELEBRATES ITS FIRST YEAR IN POWER. A NEW PARADE GROUND VARIOUSLY DUBBED RED SQUARE, REVOLUTION SQUARE OR NATIONAL SQUARE, HAS BEEN CREATED AT THE REPORTED

COST OF OVER ETH\$2 MILLION. THE EPMG HAS INVITED 150 FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM TOURIST ORGANIZATIONS TO COME TO ETHIOPIA AND OBSERVE THE CELEBRATIONS IN THE HOPE THAT THESE VISITORS WILL SING ETHIOPIA'S PRAISES TO POTENTIAL TOURISTS AND
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THUS REVIVE ETHIOPIA'S STAGNANT TOURIST TRADE.

3. EMBASSY HAS BEEN RECEIVING NUMEROUS REPORTS OF IMPENDING GOVERNMENT CHANGES, INCLUDING A MINISTERIAL RESHUFFLE WHICH MAY BE ANNOUNCED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CELEBRATION. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, MOST MINISTERS (SOME SAY ALL BUT THREE OR FOUR) WILL BE REPLACED. IT IS WIDELY ANTICIPATED THAT THE EPMG WILL MAKE SOME DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENT CHANGING THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT, EITHER PROCLAIMING A REPUBLIC (OR THE INTENTION TO FORM A REPUBLIC) OR DROPPING THE WORD "PROVISIONAL" FROM THE TITLE OF THE RULING MILITARY GOVERNMENT. MOST EMBASSY SOURCES, INCLUDING SOME WHO ARE VERY WELL PLACED, AGREE THAT BRIG. GENERAL TEFERI BANTI WILL BE RETIRED AND PROBABLY REPLACED BY ONE OF THE TOW DIRG V/CHAIRMAN, MAJOR MENGISTU AND LT. COL. ATNAFU. (ANOTHER VERSION, HOWEVER, HAS TEFERI BECOMING PRESIDENT OF THE NEW REPUBLIC.) THE CONSENSUS HAS MENGISTU ASSUMING THE TITLE OF PRESIDENT WITH ATNAFU SUBORDINATE TO HIM, OR ALTERNATIVELY MENGISTU AS PRESIDENT, PMAC POLITICAL ADVISOR MIKAEL IMRU AS PRIME MINISTER AND ATNAFU AS MOND. IT IS WIDELY EXPECTED THAT OTHER DIRG MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS. EMBASSY IS UNCERTAIN WHICH, IF ANY, OF THESE CHARGES WILL BE ANNOUNCED. WE ARE AWARE, HOWEVER, OF CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM STUDENTS, ORGANIZED LABOR, TEACHERS' UNIONS, AND SOME MILITARY UNITS FOR A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. IF THE DIRG WISHES TO PLACATE ITS MOST VOCAL OPPONENTS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE EPMG WILL DROP "PROVISIONAL" FROM ITS TITLE.

4. THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR, WHOSE NATIONALS ARE CLOSE TO THE EPMG PLANNING PROCESS, HAS TOLD US THAT IT IS LIKELY THAT THE EPMG WILL ANNOUNCE AN ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION OF ETHIOPIA. THIS REORGANIZATION WOULD BE IN TWO STAGES: FIRST, NEW ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS (FEWER, LARGER IN AREA AND MORE ETHNICALLY HOMOGENEOUS) WOULD BE FORMED: INITIALLY, ADMINISTRATIVE POWER WOULD REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE ADDIS GOVERNMENT BUT IN A LATER, SECOND STATE, THESE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS WOULD RECEIVE EXTENSIVE AUTONOMY. COMMENT. SUCH AN ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION WOULD FIT INTO THE DIRG'S PROFESSED PHILOSOPHY OF PLACING THE GOVERNMENT IN THE HANDS OF THE "MASSES." IT COULD ALSO PROVIDE THE DIRG WITH THE POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO THE ERITREAN PROBLEM, THAT IS, BY OFFERING ERITREA, ALONG WITH OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS, SUBSTANTIAL LOCAL AUTONOMY. END COMMENT. STILL ANOTHER RUMOR IS THAT THE DIRG WILL CREATE A NEW SINGLE NATIONAL PARTY HEADED

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BY EITHER MENGISTU OR ATNAFU. SUCH A PARTY WILL NO DOUBT ONE DAY BE CREATED, BUT FORMATION AT THIS TIME IS PROBABLY PREMATURE.

5. WE HAVE ALSO RECEIVED NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT A DECISION WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON THE FATE OF THE REMAINING PRISONERS DETAINED ON MENELIK HILL. THESE REPORTS AGREE THAT SOME PRISONERS WILL BE RELEASED, OTHERS GIVEN LENGTHY PRISON TERMS AND STILL OTHERS WILL BE EXECUTED. (AS DEPT. AWARE, AMBASSADOR HAS ALREADY SPOKEN TO EPMG

ON THIS POINT CF: ADDIS 10739.) OUR MOST RECENT REPORTS, HOWEVER, INDICATE THAT THE DIRG PRESENTLY PLANS TO DO NOTHING WITH THE DETAINEES FOR FEAR OF EXACERBATING ADDIS' ALREADY VOLATIE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

6. OUR INFORMANTS TELL US THAT OTHER MORE OR LESS DRAMATIC ECONOMIC ANNOUNCEMENTS MAY BE FORTHCOMING IN CONNECTION WITH THE ANNIVERSARY, INCLUDING A WAGE POLICY WHICH WOULD PRESCRIBE BOTH MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SALARIES. SOME SOURCES EXPECT AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON CHANGE OF CURRENCY, POSSIBLY COUPLED WITH A CURRENCY DEVALUATION, EVEN THOUGH THE DISRUPTIVE EFFECT OF SUCH A CHANGE WOULD DETRACT FROM WHAT IS INTENDED TO BE A FESTIVE OCCASION.

7 OUR SOURCES ARE UNANIMOUS IN BELIEVING THAT THE ANNIVERSARY PERIOD IS LIKELY TO BE VOLATILE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT INCIDENTS HIGH. GENERALLY THIS SENTIMENT SEEMS TO BE BASED ON VERY LITTLE HARD INFORMATION AND MUCH MORE ON THE FEELING THAT THIS WILL BE AN EXCELLENT TIME TO EMBARRASS THE EPMG. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE NUMEROUS GROUPS, INCLUDING THOSE MENTIONED IN APRA TWO, THE ELF/PLF, TIGREAN ELEMENTS, THE AFAR, AND OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS WHO WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE CONFUSION IF THEY COULD. THE EPMG IS UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE OF THIS AND WILL MUSTER MAXIMUM SECURITY FORCES FOR THE OCCASION. (THE DIRG HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY EFFICIENT IN SECURITY AND CROWD CONTROL.) WE HAVE NO HARD INFORMATION THAT ANYTHING IS LIKELY TO OCCUR, BUT GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF NERVOUSNESS IN THE CITY AND THE POTENTIAL VOLATILITY OF THE SITUATION, WE ARE COUNCELLING AMERICANS TO AVOID CROWDS OVER THE WEEKEND AND TO DO THEIR LOCAL TRAVELING WELL BEFORE AND AFTER THE HOLIDAY STARTS AND ENDS.
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